UNITED NATIONS

World Chronicle

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GUEST: **Amb. James LEONARD**
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JOURNALISTS: Bhaskar Menon, *International Documents Review*
Barbara Crossette, *The New York Times*

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UNA/USA

Ambassador James LEONARD, Acting President of the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA/USA), discusses the Association's work to educate the American public on the activities of the United Nations. Amb. Leonard maintains that, even though the American people generally support the the UN, certain political circles in the US Congress are hostile to it, and the UN should do more to make its voice heard in Washington. The American budget problem is affecting different parts of the US Government as well as the United Nations. Amb. Leonard calls on the American Government to honour its financial obligations to the world organization and its specialized agencies.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

As the United Nations enters its second half century, it remains the only world forum for global cooperation on human problems that transcend national boundaries. But the world organization doesn't work in a vacuum. To achieve its goals in this changing world, it needs the continued support of its Member States and the peoples of the world.

Our guest today heads a national organization dedicated to strengthening the United Nations system. He is Ambassador James Leonard, Acting President of the United Nations Association of the United States of America, also known as UNA/USA. Joining me to talk with Ambassador Leonard are Bhaskar Menon of the *International Documents Review* and Barbara Crossette of *The New York Times*.

Ambassador Leonard, welcome to World Chronicle.

LEONARD: Thank you very much.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, to read the reports from Washington these days and to watch television and listen to radio, one gets the impression that the United Nations doesn't have too many friends down there. And after his victory in the Republican primaries in New Hampshire, the longest and loudest round of applause that greeted Patrick Buchanan followed his remark that a Buchanan White House would not commit American troops to United Nations command. How does your organization deal with that kind of situation? It must be pretty much uphill sledding for you.

LEONARD: Well, I think it's very important to draw distinctions between opinion in Washington or opinion in certain circles in Washington and opinion in the United States at large. All of the public opinion polls – and we have lots and lots of them; I could go through a stack of them here – show that the American public is basically strongly behind the UN and wants a stronger UN. There are, however, circles, obviously, in Washington – very conservative circles – that are extremely hostile to and critical of the UN. I think, frankly, that the UN is being used, in a sense, as a symbol, and it's really America's involvement in the world that these very conservative circles are railing against. It's international trade, it's – they're for protectionism, they're for basically pulling up the drawbridges and manning the gates.

LITTLEJOHNS: Does UNA/USA have a lobbying operation in Washington to counteract these negative –

LEONARD: No, we're not a lobbying organization, and we are a bipartisan organization. Our chairman is John Whitehead, who was Deputy Secretary of State in the

Reagan Adminstration, but we are an organization that's dedicated to educating the American people on issues of this character. And we have a network, a chapter and a network throughout the country that tries to bring home to the people the real facts with regard to the United Nations.

LITTLEJOHNS: In a democratic nation like the United States, if there is so much support on the ground, so to speak, for the United Nations, why is it that there's so much negative talk in Washington, in the Congress, and in other groups – the Heritage Foundation, which has made practically a cottage industry out of attacking the United Nations? I saw a letter just the other day from Senator Jesse Helms to one of his constituents in North Carolina accusing the United Nations of promoting socialism and saying the United States should get out of the UN and vice versa.

LEONARD: Well, it's an easy target for cheap criticism of that sort. And Washington is full of non-facts, un-facts with regard to the United Nations. And I'm afraid that – we're not an enormous organization; I can't say that we are able to inform the American people as effectively as we would like on a lot of the non-facts that they have presented to them. They have the idea that we are spending hundreds of dollars per capita on the United Nations when the real figure is seven dollars per year per American for every –

LITTLEJOHNS: And that's for everything.

LEONARD: – everything in the system. It's $1.44 for the central UN, as you know from – I'm sorry, it's 44 cents for just the central UN, the Security Council –

LITTLEJOHNS: Which is actually less than the amount which is contributed by one of your former territories, namely Palau, which is – I think the highest is something like six and a half dollars.

LEONARD: Other countries spend a great deal more per capita than we do, yes. We are not bearing an unfair share of the burden. But none of these facts are easily broadcast to a country as large as ours. If we had a tiny little country it'd be a lot easier to get the facts into the hands of all the people that need them.

MENON: One of the problems which you obviously face now is that the – formerly it used to be that the liberals would support the United Nations and the conservatives would not; but in this new situation that's emerged, the major corporations, which are all for globalization and for support of global bodies like the UN, are opposed by formerly liberal sections of the population, like the workers, who are threatened by the forces of globalization. How do you deal with this?

LEONARD: Well, the workers worry. The labour unions in this country do worry about the effects of things like NAFTA, which, by the way, of course, is not a UN operation.

LITTLEJOHNS: The North American Free Trade Agreement.

LEONARD: The North American Free Trade Agreement. And that's a legitimate worry, I think. And I try to point out that one of the best means of dealing with that is the maintenance of fair labour standards such as those the ILO, the International Labour Organisation, in Geneva, tries to establish for every country in the world, so that you don't have sweatshops that take jobs away from American workers. Now, I think the American labour movement in its leadership understands this, but they're like us, they have trouble getting the facts across to all of the members in every corner of this huge country.

MENON: Well, why do you think they're so badly informed? The United States has the best media in the world. Why are people so uninformed?

LEONARD: Well, I hate to keep singing this song, but we are a huge country. If we were the Netherlands, the role of foreign affairs in our daily life would be enormously greater than it is in the life of an average American. We have a huge country. And I think this is true of China, of Russia, of India, if I may suggest – internal matters are proportionately far more important to countries that are in fact continents or subcontinents.

CROSSETTE: Has the UN any responsibility in this? I mean, do you – are there things that the UN could be doing to sort of help you out, as it were? Should it be trying to reach the American people in any way, since it is in fact here?

LEONARD: Well, I know the Secretary-General takes this whole matter very seriously and tries. It's difficult. He doesn't have a vast propaganda apparatus at his disposal either. But he tries. He was down yesterday in Washington talking to what people call the foreign policy elite in Washington about these problems and putting the situation frankly in front of them. But again, it's just not easy to get the word out in every corner of a country like this. I do think, however, that the UN could do more in its own defence. But one wonders, what is "the UN" in this case? Because the Secretariat is not the UN, the UN is Member States.

MENON: One of the issues that has become a political issue in the United States is that of global governance. Now, it used to be that, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, global governance was like apple pie, and you really couldn't go wrong with global governance, because it wasn't world government, you were merely saying that the world was one, and there were corporations and trade and so on that tied countries together. But now it's suddenly become an incendiary phrase almost, because of factions, you know, factors like the Michigan Militia have suddenly seen a red flag in this, and they're afraid of black helicopters coming over –

LITTLEJOHNS: Seen a blue flag, you mean!

[LAUGHTER]

MENON: Yes!

LEONARD: Well, I think that's a phase. This is cyclical, this sort of business. And clever propagandists, clever manipulators of public opinion have picked up on global governance as a kind of buzzword that they can readily denounce and get a positive reaction against. But I don't think that the American people on the whole feel that way at all.

MENON: But is there something real behind it, to the extent that the United States is now the only global super-Power, and the United Nations represents rule of law, which – the rule of law, of course, is a constriction on any Power, on any super-Power.

LEONARD: Yes, it is.

MENON: So is there a basic antithesis that goes beyond rhetoric?

LEONARD: Well, there is in our long history a constant strain of anti-foreign feeling, you know, that goes way back to the first immigrants that got here and began trying to prevent the next wave of immigrants, and so on and so on. You've had that all through American history, this isolationism, anti-foreignism and all of that. But that does not dominate in American life today. On the contrary, when you take public opinion polls, they welcome the contributions that new immigrants make to this country.

CROSSETTE: A couple of years ago, I guess it was after the Rio summit, people started to talk about the popularization of – or democratization, I suppose I should say, of diplomacy, the fact that NGO groups, non-governmental organizations, private organizations were beginning to get involved in these global issues. And we've had a series of conferences now where NGOs have been very important, and a lot of people-to-people meeting has been going on, as distinct from government-to-government. It also used to be said that this would perhaps bring the American people closer to the functioning of the United Nations and all its various agencies and under its various guises and various conferences. Do you see something like this happening? Is it an encouraging sign?

LEONARD: Well, it's something that we must do, actually. You know, our organization – there's an enormous amount of energy liberated by those conferences, and you've got women stirred up by the Women's Conference, the population people stirred up by that conference, and so on. And I think we – the UNA has not done as well as it should in bringing those people together and making them understand that you've got to have a central machinery, as you described it at the outset, for dealing with problems that are not – that transcend the boundaries of national States. So that's very much on our agenda, to try to get the people who are the leaders and the activists among those organizations for all of these global issues to make their voice heard in Washington.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Leonard, tell us a bit more about UNA/USA. How do you operate? Do you have regional, city, state chapters?

LEONARD: We have chapters, as we call them, 150-plus of them around the country, some more active and some less. And the members commit themselves to try to do what they can to deal with the kind of problems we've been talking about here. In addition, we have a small office in Washington, four or five people; we have a larger but still not exactly gigantic office in New York; and we try to gather the information, to put it in some sort of usable form. And I think you people all have in front of you one of the best things we've ever done, this –

LITTLEJOHNS: National Taxpayers –

LEONARD: A briefing book on the whole financial problem of the United Nations. How is it paid for by the Member States? What are our obligations? How much is it? Where does it come in the whole big picture?

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you receive corporate support?

LEONARD: Oh, yes. We do.

LITTLEJOHNS: Because there are a number of corporations that support anti-UN groups like the Heritage Foundation – it's a classic example. Coors and Miller Brewing and people like that support these guys; who are the people who support you?

LEONARD: Well, we have on our board people from very important industries and from Wall Street firms, investment bankers, that sort of thing. John Whitehead himself made a career in Wall Street before he went into the State Department. We also are able, fortunately, to raise very large sums of money from these same corporations, when we give a dinner or something of that sort: have a distinguished guest, someone from the UN, to address them, and the business leaders, who are by and large oriented toward the outside world, they turn out for these, and they pay more than you and I would like to pay for a dinner to come and sit there and participate in that activity.

CROSSETTE: But are we not maybe using a lot of these business people, including also the people who joined the Business Council for the United Nations, to look for new ideas in the financial area, to maybe get some brainstorming and thinking whether or not these things fit in the UN Charter? There might be some people out there who know how to make money.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, before you answer that.... This is **World Chronicle**, our guest is Ambassador James Leonard, Acting President of the United Nations Association of the United States of America.

LEONARD: Well, of course, dealing with how the UN finances itself is a matter for Member States, and they certainly are going to have to look at their whole problem of financing very seriously over the years to come, because it isn't working all that well. There's no secret about this. I do think that the fuss that's been raised about so-called international

taxation is absolutely outrageous, because there is no possibility of doing anything of this sort unless Member States want it. If they want it, then something of that kind of course will happen. But the practical possibilities in the near term involve getting the Member States – in the first instance, obviously, my native country, the United States – to pay what we owe.

MENON: Historically, you know, the United States has never had a large standing military establishment; that's essentially post-war, after the Second World War.

LEONARD: Second World War, yes.

MENON: After the Second World War. To what extent do you think this is a factor affecting America's engagement with the rest of the world?

LEONARD: Well, it certainly has affected perceptions. I think that a lot of Americans who know how much we spend on our military establishment say, well, look, we're doing our duty there. We're not the policemen of the world, but we're kind of the reserve force, if you like, standing in the background, ready to be helpful if we can be. And that makes them think that others should take over a larger share. This certainly lay behind the reluctance of, first, the Bush Administration and then the Clinton Administration to put troops into Bosnia. They said this is a European problem, the British and French are right there, they are the ones who should be in the front lines. And, give them credit, the British and French did send their forces. So that I think there is an element in what you suggested; the enormous expenditures that we make on our military establishment – too large in my view – we're spending about as much as all the rest of the world put together. But that makes Americans think that, okay, we've done our duty there, now why –

MENON: But my question was – angled slightly differently – with the existence of such a large sector in your economy and your politics dedicated to military, would that affect the country's engagement with an international organization dedicated to peace and rule of law?

LEONARD: Because we'd be anxious to use our – practise with the army? No! [LAUGH]

MENON: Obviously there are people –

LEONARD: Quite the contrary. You know, the doctrine of the American military is extremely conservative about when to get engaged. We can thank General Colin Powell for having put through, in the aftermath of Vietnam, an absolutely stringent set of conditions.

MENON: But how about the people who supply them with arms? The arms producers would need to keep an unstable world in order to keep their profits high.

LEONARD: I don't really believe that, no. They certainly want to keep selling their goods, and they want to sell them to other people as well as to the United States. I'm afraid they do very well at that. But I don't think that plays any role in the attitude of the

American people toward the UN as an organization dedicated to peace. On the contrary, if there's anything the American people want, it's peace. And they are even very reluctant, as you know, to get involved in peace-keeping because that seems to be more military than –

MENON: And opinion polls consistently show a very high support of the UN in the general population.

LEONARD: Very high. And in fact there's an interesting one that I saw just the other day, and I think I can quote it, but when asked what institutions they would like to see weaker, they start with the IRS, the Internal Revenue Service. Who's surprised at that? When they're asked what institutions they'd like to see stronger, number one on the list is the United Nations. The percentage who call for that is only 39 per cent; Americans are not in general asking for stronger institutions, whether national or international, but the UN is number one on the list. And when they're asked "Would you rather support a multilateral intervention through the UN or a unilateral operation by the United States?" the UN wins hands down, no questions.

CROSSETTE: May I move from the Pentagon to the State Department? It also follows something earlier that Bhaskar said. Do you see a lack of enthusiasm in a State Department run by basically a Democratic Administration, which one should hope would be more friendly to the United Nations? Is there something – or is there something more functionally sort of traditional about a lack of a multilateral constituency in the State Department that would be more out front in support of the UN as often as it could?

LEONARD: Well, when I first came here some 25 years ago, I remember older hands telling me there never has been a secretary of state who took the UN seriously. So if that criticism is levelled at Warren Christopher, which I don't think is fair, nevertheless it would not be the first time that that was the case. What I think you've had in the State Department in the three and a half years of the Clinton Administration is a focus on other matters, on the Middle East. Mr. Christopher has made an enormous effort to get peace in the Middle East, and, Lord be praised, he's had considerable achievements, successes in that area. So I think that these other things have tended to take priority and have left the UN in a sense a bit of an orphan at the very top level of US policy-making in Washington.

CROSSETTE: Can I just add to that? We shouldn't be putting you on the mat here for the Administration, that's not what you're defending, but you mentioned the ILO earlier; this apparently is on what I sort of loosely call a hit list, even of this Administration, for reduced, or perhaps even withdrawal of, American support.

LEONARD: I hear this. I really don't understand why. What reasons are – I just heard this the other day, and I'm baffled by the idea. I was involved in the whole business

of withdrawing and then coming back into the ILO, back in a previous Democratic administration. And my impression is that it does a good job.

MENON: Yes, well, I was talking to someone from Washington and they said that this is not Administration policy, that this is one faction of the Administration trying to push forward this policy and that when Mickey Kantor heard about it he was outraged and sort of vowed to stop –

LEONARD: I would suspect that you have the right story. I think that people are looking for objects to put on a hit list, and we've already said that we will withdraw from UNIDO, which in my own impression is not a great disaster to be withdrawing from. Others have been much more strongly – other countries, including our friends – Italy, I think, for example – have been much more strongly in support of that. But I think some differentiation in that respect, that some countries support one organization more strongly and another less strongly, that's not unhealthy.

LITTLEJOHNS: What do you think of the prospects for the United States returning to UNESCO, the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization?

LEONARD: Well, let me put that in the framework of the general problem of the US paying its dues. I don't think we'll return to UNESCO unless we can pay the regular dues that we owe, and pay the peace-keeping dues that we owe. These are assessed contributions, and those have to come before we take on additional obligations. I think the real problem there is that the budget difficulty between the Congress and the Administration has obscured this whole problem of, and put in very much second, third, twentieth place, the problem of paying our UN dues. And until the fundamental budget problem of this country is solved in some way or other, which may not be, for all I can tell, till after the next election, I don't think you will get a really fundamental solution of the problem that is so urgently needing solution, that is, payments to the UN.

MENON: You know, at the end of the cold war there was a joke going around the UN. It said that the cold war's ended, Japan won. To what extent is this a factor psychologically affecting the perception of the American people of the UN? That somehow the world itself has gained from what the United States did, and that it's time –

LEONARD: There is a widespread perception that we've been taken advantage of, that others are benefitting. There is, as I said, an utterly wrong impression of how much we put in and how much we have put in in the past. If you compare it with what we did in the Marshall Plan, for example, this is peanuts, what we're contributing to international development today. We could afford a great deal more. But I don't hope for that in the near future. That's simply not on. We've got to get past the budget stringency in the budget of the entire American Government. I mean, the State Department itself is being squeezed,

it's closing posts all over the world. And we're cutting back on our commitments to all sorts of international activities. The UN is one that's caught up in this very unfortunate and, I hope, very temporary pattern.

LITTLEJOHNS: With the benefit of hindsight, Ambassador, do you think perhaps it was a mistake to locate the United Nations in the United States? And specifically in the largest city in the United States? It seems to make it the focus of more hostile attitudes than might be the case if it were, say, in a neutral country like Switzerland.

LEONARD: I don't really think so. I think it was a wonderful thing. And it was done very deliberately, because the people who put the UN together in 1945 understood very clearly this history that I referred to of American isolationism, of the waves of isolation that come over us. I think really, as I said, because we're a big country, we have a natural basis for turning inward in our concerns, and we have very serious problems in this country that have got to be dealt with. But I think to have it here in New York is really a marvellous – it's certainly great for the city of New York, for the industry, in spite of the minor problems they have with parking tickets and so on. And it's really a very good thing.

MENON: One of the things that's always struck me is that the corporate community in the United States has always been outward looking, the least isolationist, in fact, not isolationist at all.

LEONARD: Right.

MENON: And yet they have not been very strong or vocal or overt supporters of the UN. Why is that?

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, Archer Daniels Midland gave money for the fiftieth anniversary commemoration.

LEONARD: A very large contribution, yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: Although the boss of the company is a great buddy of Senator Dole, and provided his corporate plane for him to travel around.

LEONARD: The boss of the company, I remember meeting him during the Carter Administration, he's a very thoughtful, broad-minded, internationalist businessman, and he gives to both parties very heavily –

LITTLEJOHNS: That's very smart.

LEONARD: – in this country. [LAUGH]

MENON: But generally wouldn't you agree that the corporate community has not been overtly seen as internationalist?

LEONARD: I think it's not seen that way in part because nationalists or isolationists tend to be noisier, and it's less fashionable, it's not as interesting to get an internationalist on the tube any more. But I think, in general, I think they also, to some degree, being

conservative, being often predominantly, though certainly not exclusively, Republican, they have tended to go along with some of the criticisms without being as well informed as they might be. And of course that's the task of our corporate leaders in our organization, to try to make sure that their colleagues don't proceed on the false premises that are so widespread here.

LITTLEJOHNS: And the media perhaps have not done the job that they should do to carry the –

LEONARD: Oh, good! Let's start criticizing the media! I think that would be wonderful!

[LAUGHTER]

CROSSETTE: You've got 10 seconds left!

[LAUGHTER]

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, Ambassador, that's all the time we have. That's how we get out of that one. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been Ambassador James Leonard, Acting President of the United Nations Association of the United States of America. He was interviewed by Bhaskar Menon of the *International Documents Review* and Barbara Crossette of *The New York Times*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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